

Village de la Gare: Transit-Oriented Residential Development

Organization

Ville de Mont-Saint-Hilaire – Département d'urbanisme (Town of Mont-Saint-Hilaire – planning department)

Status

Started 2002, in progress

Overview

After the commuter train linking Mont-Saint-Hilaire to downtown Montreal began operating, the town of Mont-Saint-Hilaire decided to create a residential development around the station called *Village de la Gare*, based on a *transit-oriented development* (TOD) concept.

The aim of this approach is to reduce the use of cars in a village or town by designing the facilities as they were designed in olden days, to give priority to walking or cycling.

The project began in 2002 and is taking shape:

- 100 of the 1,000 housing units have been built.
- Development of the station is complete.
- The town by-laws governing construction in this area have been amended.
- Road and landscaping development has been done in the village.

Contact

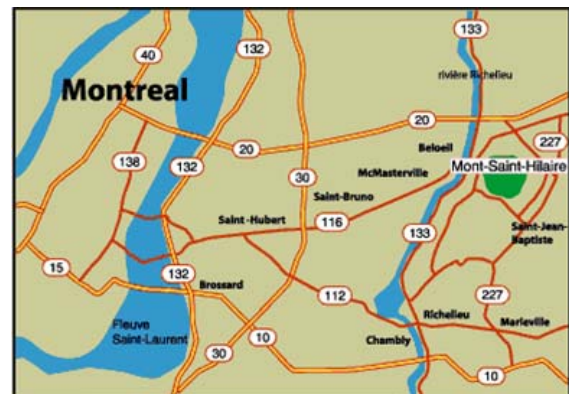
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Resources

- Town of de Mont-Saint-Hilaire (www.ville.mont-saint-hilaire.qc.ca)
- Village de la Gare (www.levillagedelagare.com)
- Agence métropolitaine de transport (www.amt.qc.ca)

Community context

Nestled at the foot of one of the Montérégie hills, Mont-Saint-Hilaire is a small residential town on Montreal's South Shore, 40 kilometres from downtown Montreal. Its population is about 14,500.



Source: McGill University

The town has a wealth of natural features: a mountain, a lake, a river and many orchards. With all these natural resources, the town is oriented toward nature and the well-being of the townspeople. The mountain was designated as a World Biosphere Reserve by UNESCO in 1978 because of its unique biological and geological features.

Mont-Saint-Hilaire covers an area of 43 square kilometres. Its road network consists of 100 km of urban roads, 30 km of rural roads and 24 km of highways owned by the Quebec ministère des Transports. The town has four bus routes (two of which pass by the station) and a train Mont-Saint-Hilaire to downtown Montreal.

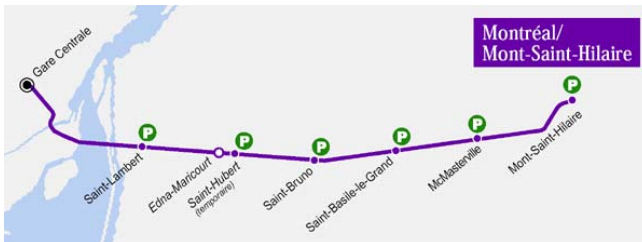
The train service has been available on weekdays since 2002, from Monday to Friday. Departure and return times are matched to conventional work schedules. The four departures of the train from Mont-Saint-Hilaire to Montreal are scheduled between 5:45 and 7:30 a.m., and the four return trips between 5:15 and 7:00 p.m.

Policy context

Since the arrival of the automobile, major North American cities have developed along the main highway corridors. This type of urban development has led to many problems associated with cars: road congestion, noise, urban sprawl, pollution, growing dependence on cars, accidents, health problems, and so on.

To deal with this problem, many cities have created development concepts aimed at facilitating travel by bus, subway, streetcar, walking and bicycling. This concept, called transit-oriented development or TOD, has been introduced in a number of European and U.S. cities, including Seattle, Portland and Redmond.

In May 2000, the Agence métropolitaine de transport (AMT) restored service for the train (called a commuter train) linking downtown Montreal with the Saint-Lambert, Saint-Bruno and McMasterville stations. There was one departure in the morning and two in the afternoon. In September 2001 the service was increased to two departures in the morning and three in the afternoon. In September 2002 the commuter train service was extended to include Mont-Saint-Hilaire station, and the number of departures was raised to four in the morning and four in the afternoon. In late 2003 service was added to Saint-Basile-le-Grand station, and in December 2003 to Saint-Hubert station.



The commuter train service linking Mont-Saint-Hilaire to downtown Montreal via other suburban centres.

Following the introduction of the train by AMT, and with a view to preserving a better quality of life, the town of Mont-Saint-Hilaire adopted the TOD approach in creating the Village de la Gare. This development is characterized by high density and a variety of functions, with residential, commercial and institutional uses all close together in one area. The town of Mont-Saint-Hilaire is the first town in Quebec to use this concept, although it is very popular in Europe and the United States.

This urban village resembles the villages of yesteryear, in which all facilities are grouped together, so that people can shop on foot. This reduces the use of cars and places people at the core of the development. Thus the district is less polluted, quieter, safer and more friendly.

Rationale and objectives

This innovative project aims to offer a new way of living in suburban Montreal, similar to what is being done in a number of the world's major cities.

The objective of this type of project is to create a multifunctional district around public transit systems, making it possible to preserve the town's natural character. In the specific case of Mont-Saint-Hilaire, the concept of developing 1,000 housing units on a completely rehabilitated former industrial site (sugar refinery) aims to promote conservation of the natural setting at the edge of the mountain, while reducing development pressure around the mountain. Installing the services close at hand will encourage people to bicycle or walk, and thereby reduce the use of cars and preserve the quality of life in the area.

The design of Village de la Gare is based on the philosophy and objectives of sustainable development, which in this case means urban development centred around public transit. Furthermore, the residential area is located in such a way as to create a traffic area extending no farther than 750 metres from the station. The densities are higher in the immediate area of the station.



The mountain gives the district exceptional character

Actions

Four potential sites were studied, using multi-criteria analysis focusing on the functional and practical aspect of the station, traffic, user comfort and infill development.

The choice of site was largely determined by the presence of the train service. Part of the site was at one time used for agri-food. It covers an area of approximately 73 hectares (100 football fields), or 30% of the urban area of the town. Development of the natural features (waterway and linear park) was a very important concern for the developers throughout the project.

Once the site had been chosen, it was analysed in co-operation with the Quebec ministère de l'Environnement to ensure that there was no contamination and to assess the condition of the water table.

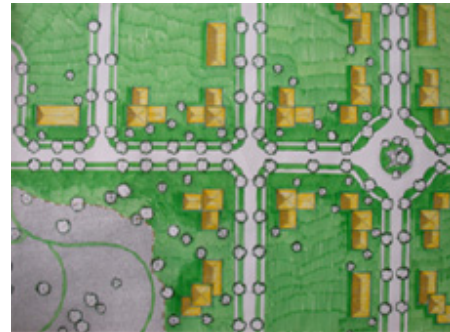
When the project is completed, Village de la Gare will have 1,000 residential units, all within a 750-metre radius of the station – the equivalent of about a ten-minute walk. The district is being developed to provide an alternative to cars: walkways and cycling paths lead to the station.



The 73-hectare site is located between the Richelieu River and the railway line. The high-density areas (red) are located near the station, and the outlying areas (yellow) are less dense. A primary school (blue) is also planned.

Site development

About 14% of the site will be green space. Trees will be planted around the site to act as a windbreak.



The site development is designed to facilitate moving around without using cars and to preserve the natural character of the site

Road system

The road network will be designed to incorporate a number of traffic calming measures:

- Traffic circles will replace traffic lights at two strategic points in the village.
- The development islands are small, approximately 130 metres long.
- The design of the street grid makes it harder for cars to find shortcuts to the station.



The road network forms a grid that promotes walking rather than driving



A row of trees will be planted between the two lanes of Boulevard de la Gare

Layout of buildings

A number of features give this village an air of olden days: the buildings face the streets, there is a number of different building types, the buildings are laid out according to a density principle, the architectural style is harmonized with the village of Mont-Saint-Hilaire, the rural character is emphasized, and the buildings are set back only 3 to 5 metres from the street. Also, some areas will retain attractive natural characteristics, like stands of trees, differences in ground level and interesting vistas.



There will be buildings with different densities on the same street, and the country character will be preserved



The buildings are set closer to the street (3 to 5 metres), to give an air of olden days

Modification of the town plan

Carrying out this project required modifications to the town plan, particularly by incorporating sustainable development principles. The new plan recognizes that public transit is the backbone of residential development in this district, and aims to make the Village de la Gare an infrastructure project for the town of Mont-Saint-Hilaire. The town has also had to harmonize its by-laws and the way it issues construction permits accordingly. The new zoning by-law establishes the distribution of building types: high density near the station, low density near the river. Also, all building permit applications must include a site development and architectural integration plan that complies with the applicable by-laws.

Development of the station

The architecture of the station is based on traditional station designs. It has been developed so as to minimize noise emissions in the direction of the residential areas: there are slopes to buffer the noise, the 600-space park and ride lot is near the station, and the sidings are in the industrial area.

Train

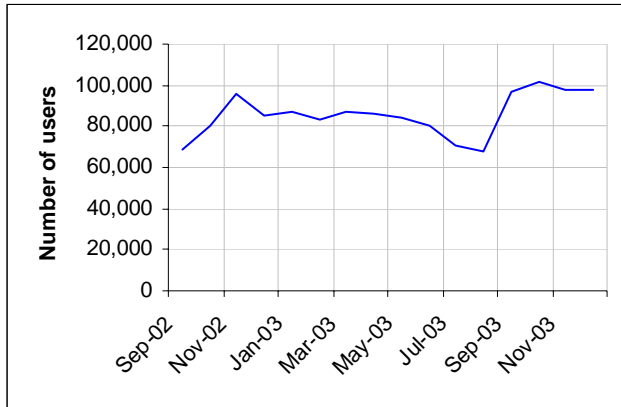
The commuter train links Mont-Saint-Hilaire directly to the central station, adjacent to the Bonaventure subway station in downtown Montreal. The 45-minute direct trip provides rapid, comfortable, punctual and economical service.



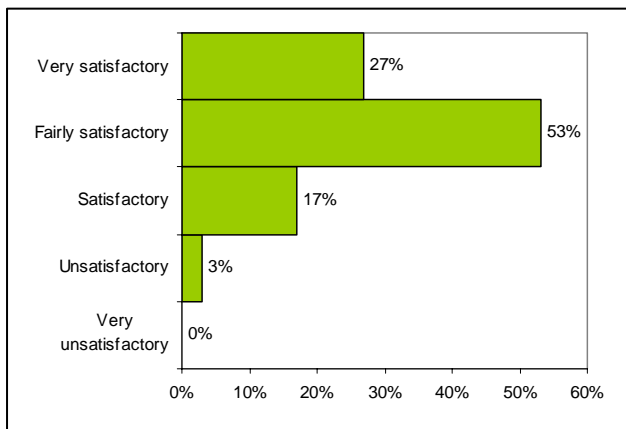
The station design is based on traditional architecture. There is a raised crosswalk for access to both sides of the station

Results

Since the project began, 100 housing units have been built. Since the commuter train service to Mont-Saint-Hilaire began in September 2002, ridership has increased by nearly 30,000. Annual ridership for this line in 2003 was 1,040,540. These figures show that there actually has been a reduction in automobile use for commuting to work.



According to a survey done by the Agence métropolitaine de transport in September 2003, users were satisfied with the service.



Also, the value of housing in Mont-Saint-Hilaire has risen since the village was developed. Outside the village, the value of condominiums located near the station has risen 30% to 40%. In 2004, new residences built in the Village de la Gare have been selling for \$250,000 or more.

Participants

The Agence métropolitaine de transport (AMT), in cooperation with the town of Mont-Saint-Hilaire and the private developer Cooke, Bombardier & Lesage, began building the Village de la Gare in September 2002. The Quebec ministère de l'Environnement participated in production of the environmental assessment for the site. The firm of Roche-Deluc helped develop the road network plans. A number of local players, including townspeople, the town planning advisory committee and the town

council, also participated in developing the project. The other project consultants are: Luc Bougie, urban planner; Christian Faubert, P.Eng., Groupe Conseil BMST Roumon; Alan Bellavance, architect, Atelier A. Bellavance; Martin Choinière, P.Eng., circulation, Roche-Leduc; Jules Hurtubise, economist; and the staff of the planning unit of the Agence métropolitaine de transport.

Resources

This project will require investments estimated at \$150 million. The costs of developing the infrastructures have been shared, according to areas of jurisdiction, among the town, the Quebec ministère des Transports, the Agence métropolitaine de transport and the private developer. The Revi-Sols program of the Quebec ministère de l'Environnement covered part of the cost of decontaminating the land previously occupied by a sugar refinery.

Timeline

The Village de la Gare will be built over a ten-year period:

- **2002.** Start of project
- **2003.** Construction of 100 residential units
- **2005.** Development of a parking area with trees, sidewalks and streetlights.
- **2004–2012.** Construction of 100 residential units a year

Lessons learned

- **The quality of the design and location of the station** promote the use of the commuter train service; this leads to concrete results.
- **Acceptance of the project** by the residents is important. To promote acceptance, the town gave public presentations to explain the suburban high-density project to all the townspeople.
- **The high level of investment by the municipality** was a major factor in the project's success.
- **It is difficult to harmonize the priorities** of the many public organizations involved, because they differ in the degree of importance they attached to the project.
- **Partnerships can create problems in distributing infrastructure costs** that become highly political.

Next steps

- The AMT will develop bus platforms.
- The Conseil Intermunicipal de Transport de la Vallée du Richelieu (CITVR) has conducted a study on redeployment of its local bus routes to the station. In the near future it will change its routes to reflect the results obtained.
- One hundred residential units are to be built each year up to 2012.
- The Village de la Gare townspeople will be surveyed on their satisfaction with the concept.

All images are courtesy of Ville de Mont-Saint-Hilaire or Agence métropolitaine de transport, except as noted